



## **District 26 VA Working Group Recommendations**

### ***Working together to better serve our veterans***

Beginning in June of this year, Congressman Garcia instituted a series of working group meetings throughout the district with local veterans. During these meetings, the working group discussed issues, ideas, and ways to move forward and address concerns at both the national and local level. VA Director Paul Russo and other VA representatives also attended working group meetings.

This white paper outlines a number of recommendations that came out of these working group discussions. Local facilities where these recommendations are most applicable are noted.

#### ***1. Ensuring timely, high quality care***

- a. Veterans should not suffer through excessive wait times to see doctors and receive the care they need.
- b. While undertaking long-term improvements to improve the VA system, veterans should be able access private care providers to ensure that their health care needs are met. (All clinics)
- c. In the long-term, VA systems should coordinate and contract with private providers and local hospitals to cover gaps in services, particularly with regards to veterans who must travel long-distances to access specialist care. (Key West, and Key Largo Clinics mainly, but also Homestead to a certain extent)

#### ***2. Improving Communication and Accountability***

- a. This crisis made clear that the adequate information was not getting to leadership, leading to a lack of accountability. H.R. 4031, the Department of Veterans Affairs Management Accountability Act will make it easier to remove poorly performing VA executives, however systematic changes are needed at the national level to facilitate a better flow of information from the field to the national management.
- b. Improved outreach and communication is needed to ensure that veterans are aware of local facilities and the full range of services they offer. (All clinics)

### ***3. Upgrading Physical Facilities***

- a. With the veterans population's having grown dramatically in the aftermath of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, it is critical that the VA invest in 21<sup>st</sup> century physical facilities in order to provide high quality care. (Homestead and Miami VA Hospital)
- b. The Homestead clinic and similar VA centers that serve rapidly growing veterans communities should be renovated, expanded, and/or supplemented to ensure that veterans receive the care they deserve. (Homestead)

### ***4. Improving Mental Health Care Services***

- a. In light of the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health care challenges that many veterans face, the VA should expand the availability of psychiatric and psychological services. (Keys' clinics)
- b. Since Key West health care services mostly consist of primary care services, the VA needs to take steps to ensure that Keys veterans have more geographically proximate access to mental health care providers. (Keys' clinics)
- c. Although the Homestead clinic does provide a greater array of mental health care services, they should be expanded in order to adequately serve Homestead's growing veterans community. (Homestead)

### ***5. Improving Access for Rural Communities***

- a. In light of the significant number of veterans who live in communities far from urban facilities, such as the Florida Keys, it is critical that VA take steps to ensure that they have access to doctors and services. (Keys' Clinics)
- b. Whether through increasing VA personnel in rural communities or allowing rural veterans to access private providers, it is critical the VA commit itself to reducing rural disparities in access to care. (Keys' Clinics)
- c. Shuttle service should be expanded and made more efficient to meet existing needs.

### ***6. Accessible Appointment Times***

- a. In addition to eliminating delays, the VA should expand the hours of VA clinics given that many veterans work full-time and may have to travel long distances to a VA facility. (All clinics)